3 The make-up of Israeli society

The modern state of Israel was founded in 1948: On May 14th David Ben-Gurion proclaimed the state's declaration of independence from the British Mandate and was soon elected as its first prime minister. The iconic statesman performed the declaration in Hebrew, although it was not his native language. In fact, most of the new citizens of Israel were not native speakers of Hebrew. Ben-Gurion was born 1886 as David Grün in Plonsk, a small town north-west of Warsaw, then forming part of the Russian empire. He grew up with Yiddish, learned Russian and probably Polish to some extent (Shapira 2015: 17). Ben-Gurion studied in religious schools until his Bar-Mitzva where he was exposed to traditional religious texts in Hebrew. His parents were early supporters of the Zionist movement, read progressive journals in Hebrew and his father is known to have written letters in archaic Hebrew (Shapira 2015: 15).

At the end of the 19th century, the new Hebrew literature was well received among Jewish intellectuals and some Zionist organizations had adapted Hebrew for their publications. Yet, it was very uncommon to come across spoken Hebrew – even among educated Zionists (Shapira 2015: 16–17 and Walters et al. 2023: 279). Many even opposed the use of Hebrew openly and advocated the use of Yiddish. They argued that Yiddish, which was the mother tongue of most European Jews, was the language most beneficial for the goals of political Zionism (Myhill 2004: 71). This debate was carried out for several decades in continental Europe as well as in the Jewish settlements in Ottoman Palestine and culminated in the so-called *milḥemet ha-safot* 'war of the languages' (Spolsky 1997: 139 and Sivan 1984).

Having some passive command of the language from his early childhood, the adolescent Ben-Gurion decided to speak only Hebrew with two friends. The boys' decision, which was followed by the foundation of a Zionist youth organization in their hometown, is portrayed by Shapira as being symbolic of the their ardor for the growing political and cultural movement. After his emigration to Ottoman Palestine in 1906, Ben-Gurion quickly took up his political activity and allegedly held his first speech in Hebrew as a statement against *Yiddishists*. Most of the attendants of the meeting apparently neither understood Hebrew nor Yiddish and some even left in consequence. Although the audience probably would have preferred to be addressed in Russian, they elected Ben-Gurion to his first political function in his new homeland (Shapira 2015: 28).

What follows is an introduction to Israel as the research field of this study. Demographic and cultural developments will be reviewed in order to enable a preliminary understanding of the social structure of Israel's population. The introduction will revolve around the thread of language which was picked up by Ben Gurion's example.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111390628-003

Especially, the development of MH and its institutionalization as Israel's national language will be described. Special attention will be devoted to prevalent cultural concepts such as 'Zionism' and 'Israeliness' – to name just two – as they are discussed in the scholarly literature. The concepts that are introduced in the following will be discussed in the context of participants' utterances in Chapter 6.

3.1 Israel's population, languages and cultures

According to Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), the country's population numbered 9.291 million people at the end of 2020. The CBS referred to 6.87 million as "Jews," almost 1.96 million as "Arabs" and 456,000 as "others" (CBS 2020e) This adds up to roughly three quarters of the population being Jews, more than a fifth Arabs and less than 5 percent others. A footnote in the publication states that the category "others" includes "non-Arab Christians and persons not classified by religion in the Population Register" (CBS 2020e).

As can be seen from the CBS data, it is common to apply several religious and ethnic categories to Israel's population. The characteristics of these and further categories will be outlined in detail in 3.1.3. To underline their artificial nature, these categories will be written in single quotation marks in the text.

One key aim of this study is to analyze in how far these commonly used categories are determined linguistically. An asymmetry in this regard is already apparent: the category 'Arabs' is commonly understood as 'speakers of Arabic as native language,' while it is clear that the equivalent 'speakers of Hebrew as native language' applies only to a part of the population which is categorized as 'Jews'. This assumption is reflected in the CBS' 2011 survey about the "Mastery of the Hebrew Language and Usage of Languages" (CBS 2013). The publication provides data about the *sfat 'em* 'mother tongue' of Israelis who were aged over 20 in 2011. While specific data about the mother tongues of "Jews" and "natives of the USSR" is presented, the authors seem to assume tacitly that "Arabs" speak Arabic as mother tongue because no information about their mother tongue is included.

In this study the notion 'native language' designates the first language that a speaker acquired in early childhood – the terms 'native language' and 'first language' (L1) will be used interchangeably. In special cases of simultaneous infant bilingualism, one speaker can have more than one L1. As it is common in second language learning theory, 'second language' (L2) will be used broadly to refer to "any languages learned later than in earliest childhood," regardless of the context and time of acquisition, language use and degree of mastery (Rosamond et al. 2013 [1998]: 1).

Though it is not clear from the CBS' publication, it seems that the data about "mother tongues" is based on participants' self-declaration in a questionnaire – it is

only stated that the data on language competence was obtained by the participants' self-estimation. This method can yield insightful data for large samples. Generally, one should bear in mind that L1 is by definition a variable which cannot be objectively measured. Therefore, it is sensible to work with participants' self-declarations, instead of ascribing a value – especially since the notion of 'native language' has been used excessively to mark groups of people in terms of ethnicity which can have negative consequences for them.

Having discussed the nature of the available data about L1s in Israel, it will be summarized as it is originally presented: the summary of the CBS data in Table 3.1 shows that, in 2011, slightly less than half of Israel's population aged over 20 were speakers of Hebrew as L1. The category "Others" includes all other languages which

Tab. 3.1: L1s spoken by Israelis aged over 20 in 2011 (CBS 2013: 2)

Speakers' Percentage	L1
Hebrew	49.0
Arabic	18.0
Russian	15.0
Others	10.4
English	2.0
French	2.0
Yiddish	2.0
Spanish	1.6

were named as L1: the text refers to Romanian, *maroḳa'it* 'Moroccan' and Amharic without indicating any numbers.

Among 'Jews,' the percentage of Hebrew as L1 is considerably higher, at 61%. Unsurprisingly, the percentage of Yiddish (2.6%) is also a bit higher, while the percentages of Russian (14%) and Arabic (3%) are lower, compared to the total percentages. No information is provided whether 'Moroccan' is subsumed under Arabic as L1 among the 'Jews' or if it is treated on its own.

From this data it can be seen that Israel's population today is multilingual. The linguistic diversity is also present in Israel's linguistic landscape, as can be seen from the three photos in Fig. 3.1 which I took during fieldwork. There are four different scripts (Arabic, Cyrillic, Hebrew and Latin) and at least 5 different languages on these signs: On the top left corner, there is a graffito in Aramaic; the regular street signs, in the middle, contain Hebrew, Arabic and English and the Cyrillic script on the green signs are indications in a Circassian language which I found in a Circassian village in Northern Israel.

Fig. 3.1: Multilingual signs in Israel

Linguistic heterogenity, especially among the Jews, is caused by the fact that Israel's population was shaped to a large extent by subsequent waves of immigration (Schwarzwald 2001: 2). However, historically the region had already been multilingual. Spolsky & Shohamy describe the linguistic situation at the end of the nineteenth century:

> The language of government, restricted in the main in its use to soldiers and officials, was Turkish. Peasants and town-dwellers spoke local dialects of Arabic. Classical Arabic was the written language of the educated elite. Sephardic Jews spoke Arabic, too, but inside the Community their language was Judezmo, a Jewish language based on Spanish, with a written form called Ladino [...] French was important culturally and politically, and German was supported by an explicit government language diffusion policy (Wahl 1996). Most of the masses of Ashkenazic Jews who started to arrive from Eastern Europe in the second half of the Century spoke Yiddish but brought with them [97] coterritorial vernaculars like Russian, Polish, and Hungarian. In contact situations like Jerusalem, bilingualism developed and changed rapidly. (Spolsky & Shohamy 1999: 96–97)

Colasuonno (2013) characterizes Israeli society as multilingual and adds that more varieties tend to be accepted which are not linked to a national Israeli identity, even though she characterizes the language policy as monolingual. Myhill (2004: 184) describes the governmental language policy towards Jewish immigrants as

comparatively generous with an "ideological trend towards some maintenance of immigrant languages and away from rak 'ivrit ('only Hebrew')" since the 1970s. Accordingly, this trend was reinforced by the arrival of "large numbers of immigrants from the ex-Soviet Union with little or no background in Hebrew" (Myhill 2004: 184). According to the CBS (2013: 4), more than 3.7 million people who were aged at least 20 indicated that they speak a L2: 40% of them reported to mix languages in conversation. This ratio is considerably higher among 'Arabs' with 63%, compared to the ratio among 'Jews' (35%). Among 'Arabs' 98% speak Arabic and 4% Hebrew at home. Apparently, these statements are not meant exclusively – that is to say that some speak both languages at home. Even 99% reported speaking Arabic with their friends: 67% reported speaking only in Arabic in these situations and 32% speak Hebrew (too). Even if not every Israeli Arab is a fluent speaker of Hebrew, for almost every Israeli Arab Hebrew has become their L2 either by choice or by necessity. Hence, it is important to systematically include this large group of speakers in sociolinguistic studies about MH.

In the group of "foreign-born Jews," 47% reported to mix languages with an increased ratio of 65% among the younger generation aged between 20–44. 88% of the immigrants who were born in the former Soviet Union speak Russian at home and 48% (also) speak Hebrew at home. At work 93% of them speak Hebrew and 57% speak (also) Russian. There is a positive correlation between a higher income from occupation and a good command of Hebrew (based on self-estimation) among 'Arabs' and immigrants who arrived after 1990 (CBS 2013: 5).

In respect to possible language variation in Hebrew, Schwarzwald (2007: 76) asserts that the influence on Hebrew of Ethiopian and Russian *'olim* is not yet measurable, whereas Spanish has gained some prestige, due to the popularity of *telenovelas*. Schwarzwald (2007: 73) upholds that only educated HSs are exposed to other languages – mainly English and to a lesser extent French and German – while most HSs, including college students, are not able to use foreign languages.

Arabic has lost its legal status as co-official language in 2018. It is used by Israeli Arabs as L1 and in a parallel educational system (Myhill 2004: 193). It is also taught as L2 in Jewish schools, but usually not mastered by native HSs. A brief summary of the history and the politics of immigration in Israel, as well as about the juridical definition of the category 'Jews' will be given in the next section.

3.1.1 Zionism, the Jewish State and the Law of Return

Since its foundation in 1948, the State of Israel has been encouraging Jews to immigrate by granting them citizenship after a short period of time. During the process of their so-called *ḳliṭa* 'absorption' they can receive assistance for housing, Hebrew

courses and financial aid. Thus, every year, thousands of *'olim ḥadashim* 'new immigrants' make their way to Israel. In 2020, 20,000 *'olim* arrived in Israel – which is a small number compared to the 34,000 *'olim* who arrived in 2019. The reason for the decrease is explained by "the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic and the closing of Israel's borders to air travel." In 2020, most of the *'olim* came from "Russia (38.1%), Ukraine (15.1%), France (11.0%) and the US (10.7%)" (CBS 2020e). As the verbatim translation of the singular form *'oleh* 'ascendant' suggests, *'olim* are ideally met with respect for their decision to support the nation-building of the Jewish state by means of their physical presence in Israel.

The ideological concept of 'Zionism' is the reason for Israel's welcoming immigration policy towards Jews. Zionism developed in 19th century Europe, where Jews were struggling to preserve their collective identity against the threat of emerging nationalisms. Taub renders the programmatic thesis of Zionism which is in turn based on a nationalistic ideology:

> Jews will be able to become sovereign over their own fate without giving up their Jewish identity, if they perceive their own identity in national terms and create their own democratic nation-state. (Taub 2014: 41)

While the Zionists' dream of a nation-state came true with the foundation of modern Israel, Zionism in its many facets is still present today. In the kibbuts where I learned Hebrew, I overheard Israelis using *tsiyonut* 'Zionism' as a positive attribute just as 'courage' or 'good work-ethics' to commend, typically, *'olim* and *ḥayalim bodedim* 'lone soldiers.[1]' As a late consequence of the Zionist conception of Israel as 'Jewish state,' the state was defined as such by law in 2018.[2]

Since the late 1970s, critical responses to Zionism have been growing in Israel: 'Post-Zionism' emerged along solidifying social inequalities which are at least partly the outcome of the ideologically motivated policy that was implemented by Ben-Gurion's ruling *Mapai* party (see 3.1.3). The *mifleget po'alei 'erets yisrael* 'Workers' Party of the Land of Israel' was devoted to a socialist strand of Zionism. Baruch Kimmerling, one of the most prominent Post-Zionist voices, contextualized Zionism and the political history of Israel in the light of Constructivism and Post-Colonial theory:

> Zionism, the national movement that motivated and was formed by Jewish immigration and settlement, was sophisticated enough to distance itself from traditional global colonialism, the historical matrix from which it developed. Zionism emphasized the uniqueness of the so-called

1 *'Olim* without relatives in the country who serve in the Israeli army.

2 The legal text can be accessed here: https://www.justice.gov.il/StateIdentity/ProprsedBasicLaws/Pages/NationalState.aspx

> Jewish problem – anti-Semitism, persecution and, later, the Holocaust – and offered itself as the sole realistic and moral solution. Thus, the Jewish immigration movement was able to successfully present itself as a return to Zion, the correction of a cosmic injustice. (Kimmerling 2008: 181)

The legal basis for immigration as *'olim* is the "law of return" which grants all "Jews" the right to immigrate to Israel.[3] The law that was passed by the *Knesset* (the Israeli parliament) on July 5th, 1950, begins as follows:

Every Jew has the right to come to this country as an oleh כל יהודי זכאי לעלות ארצה
(Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1950)

Only in 1970, the second amendment to the law was added, which defines who is eligible for immigration as *'oleh*:

> The rights of a Jew under this Law and the rights of an oleh [...] are also vested in a child and a grandchild of a Jew, the spouse of a Jew, the spouse of a child of a Jew and the spouse of a grandchild of a Jew, except for a person who has been a Jew and has voluntarily changed his religion.

'Jew' is defined as follows:

> 'Jew' means a person who was born of a Jewish mother or has become converted to Judaism and who is not a member of another religion.

From this legal definition follows that everyone who is eligible to immigration to Israel as *'oleh* but was not born to a Jewish mother is not considered as a Jew – unless he has converted to Judaism. These legal grounds lead to a contradictory situation.

> [I]t is entirely possible and not at all uncommon for someone to be entitled to emigrate to Israel and automatically become an Israeli citizen on the basis of having one Jewish grandparent but, upon receiving an Israeli identity card, be listed on it as something other than Jewish, because the Jewish grandparent is not the mother's mother. Thus, Israeli citizenship has no inherent relationship to Jewish identity. (Myhill 2004: 194)

Although the Israeli Identity Cards no longer contain information of this kind, this definition still has practical consequences for many immigrants, especially from the former USSR, who are not considered as Jewish by Israeli law. As civil marriage is not an option in Israel, many Israelis who cannot (because of their status) or do not

3 The Hebrew original can be accessed via https://www.knesset.gov.il/laws/special/heb/chok_hashvut.htm

want to marry by the means of a religious ceremony have to take a detour: marriages in a different country can be legally registered in Israel, thus allowing indirectly for marriages of Israeli citizens with persons of a different religious status than their own. On these grounds, Kimmerling (2008: 182–183) criticizes the "constitutional mixture of religion and nationality" in Israel which "allows the rabbinical courts to monopolize personal status laws" because it constitutes "basic inequality between men and women, as well between religious and secular Jews." He asserts that this leads to "severe limitations" for "women, secular citizens, and citizens who identify themselves as Jews but are not classified as Jews according the Orthodox interpretation" (Kimmerling 2008: 186).

3.1.2 Immigration to Israel

As can be seen in Fig. 3.2, most of the 3.3 million immigrants who came to Israel after the foundation of the state in 1948 arrived in the mass immigration setting in the first years of statehood and after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, in 1989 – 44.3% came after 1990 (CBS 2020b). The number of immigrants from the former Soviet Union

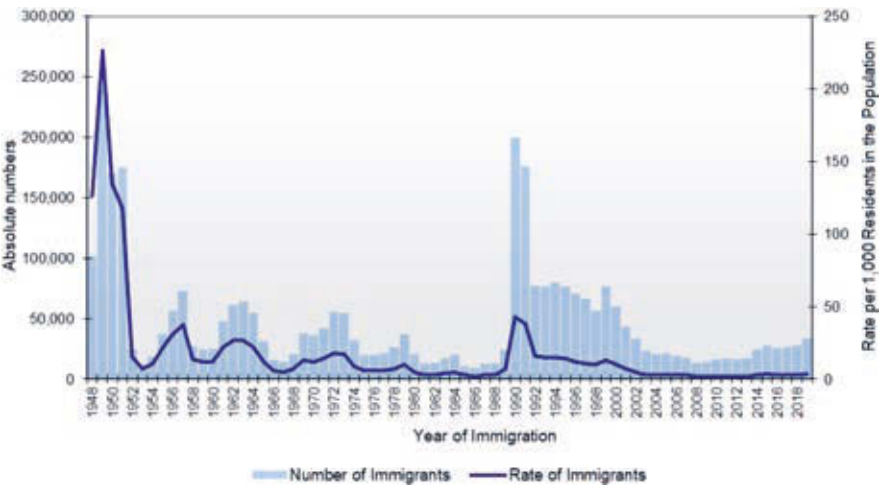

Fig. 3.2: Immigration to Israel, reproduced from CBS (2020b)

is estimated around one million, but Epstein (2016: 80) points out that it is actually much lower because "100,000 people passed away and another 100,000 – 150,000 people left Israel and settled in other countries or returned to Russia or Ukraine." A

second distinctive group of *'olim* are Ethiopian Jews who arrived mostly in the years 1984–85 and 1991 and are estimated to number about 130,000, today (Panagiotidis 2020: 122, Weingrod 2016: 282).

Before 1948, Jewish immigrants came mostly from (Eastern) Europe, like Ben Gurion. In contrary to the established religious Jewish population of mostly Middle Eastern origin – *ha-yishuv ha-yashan* 'the old community' – the new immigrants which are referred to as the "New *yishuv*" have commonly been described as secular Zionist pioneers (Weingrod 2016: 283). Against this common conception, Panagiotidis (2020: 120) points out that there were many regular immigrants among them who were looking for a better future and that some even moved on to the USA.

After the early waves of immigration, the Israeli pioneer ethos was established and "the European-origin Ashkenazim were the central dominant majority group" Weingrod (2016: 283). Lefkowitz paints a vivid picture of this ethos:

> Maintaining the notion of a classless society is predicated in part on the image of the kibbutz, a prominent symbol of communal, socialist life. Two important mythologies of Israeli society derive their power from the kibbutz image: kibush ha-avoda, 'the conquest of labor,' and kibutz galuyot, 'ingathering of exiles.' The latter phrase refers to the return of Jews from all corners of the globe to Israel, a place where few of them had ever been, and where all of them would be remade both as Jews and as Israelis. The Ulpan experience, in which doctor, merchant, and peasant alike learned the new language, Hebrew, was a central acculturating influence. Kibbutzim are known to this day as centers of Ulpan-style language teaching[...] The idea of the conquest of labor held that Jewish/Israeli redemption lay in a return to the land, to manual labor, and especially to a farming way of life. This ideology purported to treat all immigrants equally, despite enormous disparities in their wealth, skills, and education. Doctors as well as beggars remade their lives as farmers and manual laborers, abandoning class differentiation. The kibbutz was the center of manual labor and agricultural production in the early years of the Israeli state. (Lefkowitz 2004: 87)

The mass-immigration after the establishment of the state was supposed to be absorbed into the collective of the New Yishuv, as the originally Biblical expression *kibbuts galuyot* 'ingathering of the Exiles,' which was adopted as a motto by the Zionists, indicates.

In the first years of statehood, the Jewish population grew exponentially and its composition changed rapidly. According to the CBS' (2020a) data, slightly more than 700,000 Jews were living in Israel at the eve of 1948, of which 54.8% were born in Europe or America and 35.4% were already born in Israel. Almost 24 years later, in 1972, the Jewish population had almost tripled in size and amounted to nearly 2.7 million, of which 27.9% were born in Europe or America, 11.8% in Asia, 13.0% in Africa and 47.3% in Israel. The CBS' (2020a) data determines the population's "origin" by the fathers' countries of birth. Accordingly, 44.2% were of European or American origin, 24.4% from Asia, 23.0% from Africa and 8.4% from Israel, in 1972. This means,

that the ratio of Jews with Asian or African origin had surpassed the ratio of the Jews with European or American origin, in 1972. In 1995, the ratios shift back in the direction of the European or American origin, which is probably caused by the classification of the immigrants from the former Soviet Union under this category – no such information is included in the data, though. In parallel to the increase of the native Israelis, the percentage of L1 HSs is increasing among younger age cohorts: from only 18% in the cohort aged older than 64 in 2011, to 44%, in the cohort between 45 and 64 and up to 60% in the youngest cohort from 20 to 44 years (CBS 2013: 2).

Two remarks about the categorization which is used in the CBS' (2020a) data are due: Firstly, the categories 'Europe/America', 'Asia/Africa' and 'Israel' hint at a twofold distinction, primarily between 'native' and 'non-native' and then, between 'West' and 'East' among the 'non-natives. Secondly, the choice of the father's country of birth as an indicator for 'origin' hints at a conceptual preference for patrilinear genealogies. From a scientific standpoint, it is not sensible to determine the offspring of mixed marriages either through the father's or the mother's origin. Therefore, the CBS' choice of representation indicates that they did not want to give up the notion of 'origin,' completely – although it cannot be represented accurately for subsequent generations. Interestingly, no further distinction than 'native' or 'non-native' was made in the 1948 data. This distinction is first included in the data from 1962, but the numbers for 'Asia' and 'Africa' are represented as one category, as is always the case for 'Europe/America'. Only in 1972, when the ratios shifted, the distinction is made between 'Asia' and 'Africa'. Consequently, no comparison of the categories belonging to the notions 'West' and 'East' can be made at first sight, from 1972 onward. Although it is not expressed outwardly, the categories which are used in the data for the representation of the populations' 'origin' hint to the major distinctive categories among 'Jews' – *'ashkenazim* from 'European/American' origin and *mizraḥim* from 'Asian/African' origin (Weingrod 2016: 282).

3.1.3 Of *Ashkenazim*, *Mizrahim*, Arabs and others

Following Wiese (2017: 344–345) and Goldscheider (2015: 24), notions of 'ethnicity' in this study are treated as socially constructed categories which are fluid in their meanings. Under this premise, the notions of 'Mizrahi,' 'Ashkenazi' and further categories will be reassessed in the following. A contextual analysis of these categories with participants' statements will follow in Chapter 6.

The noun and modifier *'ashkenazi* was derived from the Biblical person *'Ashkenaz* and used originally in the Middle Ages to refer to Jews of a specific region in Germany. The noun and modifier *mizraḥi* which literally translates to 'Eastern(er)' is derived from *mizraḥ* 'East.' For convenience, I will use these terms in the following

in their simple form as *Mizrahi* and *Ashkenazi* and as *Mizrahim*, *Ashkenazim* in the plural. Behar argues that the sense of a *Mizrahi* collectivity can be traced back to 1911, in the context of ideological differences between the old *yishuv* and the European Zionists:

> [T]here existed in the pre-1948 modern Middle East, and remains chiefly inside Israel/Palestine today, a distinct sociocultural collectivity consisting of Eastern (non-Ashkenazi) Jews. Before or after 1948, this collectivity never assimilated its distinctive identity to either Ashkenazi Zionists or non-Jewish-Arabs. (Behar 2017: 313)

Commonly, the usage of the term *Mizrahi* is described as reappropriation by "leftist non-Ashkenazi activists" in a climate of social protest in the late 20th century (Shohat 1999: 13, Shemer 2013: 50). Chetrit describes the semantic change of the term *Sefardi* and the conventionalization of the term *Mizrahi*:

> The term *Edot haMizrah* replaced the self-definition *Sephardi*, dating back to the old *yishuv* [...] The term *Sephardi* originates from the prayer and Halachic traditions that evolved from the golden age of Judaism in Spain, which is accepted as the religious authority among the Jews of North Africa, the Middle East, the Mediterranean, and the Balkans. The new self-coined term, *Mizrahim*, heard since the early 1980s together with the appearance of a new *Mizrahi* political discourse, is mainly a social-political term, based to a lesser degree on ethnic origins. The starting point for those calling themselves Mizrahim is a view of Israeli society in terms of economic and cultural oppression of non-Europeans by Europeans in general, and of Mizrahim by Ashkenazim in particular. (Chetrit 2009: 18)

A slightly different interpretation is suggested by Mizrachi & Herzog:

> The majority of Mizrahim do not define themselves as belonging to a distinct ethnic group. [...] Some self- designate as 'Sephardi' (a Jew expelled from Renaissance Spain), a term that has softer and more positive connotations, and refers to Jewish cultural and historical traditions. The term 'Mizrahi' is more recent and associated with establishment of the State. It is more stigmatizing and political in nature, and is primarily used to designate Jews born in Arab countries. (Mizrachi & Herzog 2012: 423)

In fact, the authors imply that *Mizrahim* constitute a social group, by stating that most of them do not use the term – but that the term is used as an exonym by out-groups. However, they do not explain how membership in the category 'Mizrahim' can be determined.

It is helpful to think of the conventionalization process of the term *Mizrahi* as "reification" – in Berger & Luckmann's 1967 terminology (see 2.1.4.3). Győri (2013: 152) points out that "[t]he emergence of new meanings and expressions in the course of semantic change is not simply a process of creating a label for a cultural category but creating the category itself." In this line of argumentation, Shohat (1999: 13) states

that "the Mizrahim as an 'imagined community' are a Zionist invention" and refers to the pressure of cultural assimilation which was exerted on Arab Jewish *'olim*: in the 1950s the political implication of the Zionist motto *mizug ha-galuyot* 'fusion of the exiles' led to the partial erasure of identities and heritage languages, due to the imposition of the hegemonic culture (Weingrod 2016: 284).

Lefkowitz (2004: 15) hints at a conceptual irregularity by describing the usage of *'eda* 'ethnic group' as restricted to *Mizrahim*: "Moroccan Jews and Yemeni Jews are considered edot, but parallel groups of Ashkenazi Jews, such as German Jews and Polish Jews, are not." Why were non-European Jews marked as ethnic groups, in contrast to the "unmarked norm of 'Ashkenaziness' or Euro-Israeli 'Sabraness,' defined simply as Israeli" (Shohat 1999: 13)?

Chetrit (2009: 39) argues with the concept of 'social class' that the systematically deprived immigrants from diverse backgrounds unified themselves under the category 'Mizrahi.' Weingrod (2016: 283) and Goldscheider (2015: 91) relate ethnic consciousness in Israel to different factors like the governmental housing policy and deliberate choices of the immigrants which resulted in clustered settlements of families from the same origin who maintained their distinct identities to some degree. Goldscheider (2015: 163) describes educational gaps between children of different immigrant groups as "the result of an Israeli-generated stratification system, reinforced by a complex combination of people and institutions – schools, teachers, family, and neighbors."

> The ethnic groups designated 'Asian/Africans' and 'European/Americans' are Israeli ethnic constructions, based on the ethnic origins of groups but reflecting the contexts of Israeli society. [...] One part of the explanation for the growing similarity in the educational level attained by the diverse ethnic-origin subgroups within the Asian/African group relates to their treatment in educational and related institutions. These diverse groups were often lumped together by the European-dominated systems as if they were an undifferentiated and a socioeconomically deprived segment. (Goldscheider 2015: 163)

Ben-Rafael portrays the group of Israelis with Asian/African origin as divided into a middle-class group that has assimilated to the dominant culture and the traditional

> underprivileged Mizrahi communities that remain relatively distant from the dominant culture, however, the atmosphere of respect for tradition continues to encourage some young people to choose [...] to study at the *yeshiva* (religious academy) in order to enter a rabbinic career. (Ben-Rafael 2013: 99)

The traditionally oriented religious group, the *masoratiyim* 'traditionalists,' is addressed as electorate by the political party *shas* which was founded in 1984 by the widely popular and controversial former Sephardi Chief Rabbi, Ovadia Yosef, who

was born in Baghdad. Shohat describes the politicization of the *Mizrahi* cause with some satisfaction:

> [T]he delegitimization of Middle Eastern culture has boomeranged in the face of Euro-Israel: out of the massive encounter that has taken place between Jews from such widely separated regions as the Maghreb and Yemen emerged a new overarching umbrella identity, what came to be called 'the Mizrahim.' (Shohat 1999: 13)

Several opposing political parties tried to mobilize voters by evoking a collective *Mizrahi* identity in their campaigns for the 2015 elections:

> The newly formed Joint List, a coalition of Israel's Arab parties, claimed to represent the struggle of all underprivileged groups within Israel: Palestinians, Mizrahim, Ethiopians, Russians and the poor. The liberal Meretz party called for 'Equality for all – Arabs, Mizrahi and the LGBTQ community.' Naftali Bennet, head of the nationalist Jewish Home party, offered former football star Eli Ohana (of Moroccan origin) a prominent position within the party's Knesset list. Racing towards the lion's share of the Mizrahi electorate, Shas released adverts a week before the elections, declaring: 'Mizrahim, vote for Mizrahim.' This Mizrahi moment didn't end with the election of a right-wing coalition government. Miri Regev, a former Israeli Army spokesperson and Likud parliamentarian, became culture and sports minister. As well as railing against leftists and demanding that artists be 'loyal' to the state, she lambasted what she described as an Ashkenazi elite and a 'cultural junta', and vowed to address the disproportionate distribution of resources to Ashkenazi-oriented culture. (Madar 2017)

From this account, inferences about the relations between *Mizrahim*, other social groups and minorities can be made: all these groups together are conceptualized in opposition to the *Ashkenazim*. These dynamics have led some to diagnose a cultural and political trend in favor of the *Mizrahim* (see Averbukh 2017). It seems that the Israeli-Zionist narrative had to gain stability over the last 60 years before other cultural elements could be allowed in the story of what constitutes 'Israeliness:' now, it appears that Zionist nationalism was always natural in Israel and that everything else has been added later, while the opposite is actually true. Shohat relates the *Mizrahi/Ashkenazi* controversy to a larger context:

> Fearing engulfment by the East, the Euro-Israeli establishment attempted to repress the 'Middle Easterness' of Mizrahim as part of an effort to Westernize the Israeli nation and to mark clear borders of identity between Jews as Westerners and Arabs as Easterners. Arab Jews were urged to see Judaism and Zionism as synonyms, and Jewishness and Arabness as antonyms. Thus Arab Jews were prodded to choose between anti-Zionist Arabness and a pro-Zionist Jewishness. This conceptualization of East versus West has important implications in this age of the 'peace process,' since it sidesteps the fact that the majority of the population within Israel is from the Middle East – Palestinian citizens of Israel as well as Mizrahim. (Shohat 1999: 8)

Lefkowitz (2004) uses a diagram that is reproduced in Fig. 3.3 to draw a similar picture of the complex relations between social categories. He claims that "[d]ominant Israeli discourse simultaneously dichotomizes (exaggerates) Arab/Jewish difference while it erases (minimizes) Jewish/Jewish difference" (Lefkowitz 2004: 98). The choice of

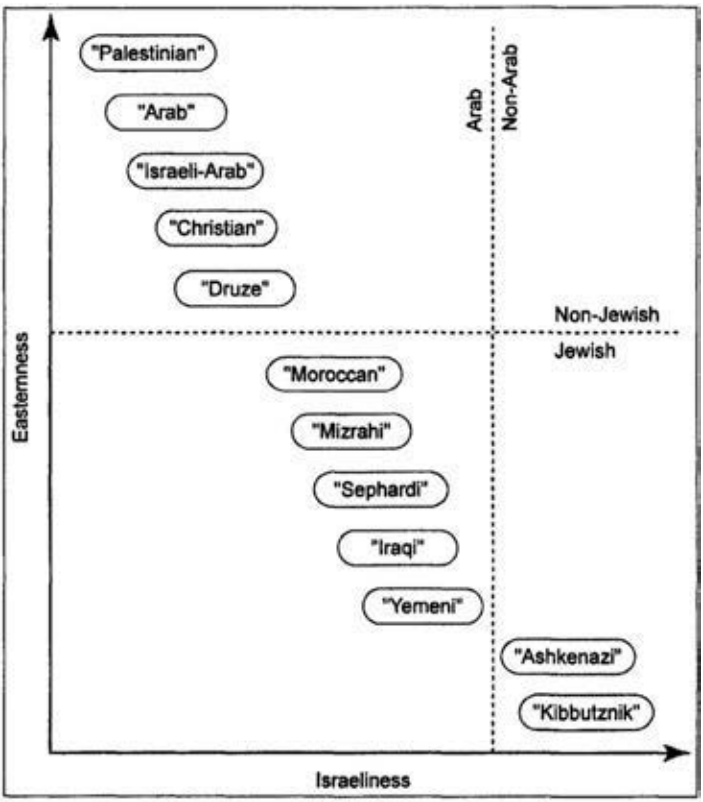

Fig. 3.3: The space of Israeli Identity (reproduced from Lefkowitz 2004: 89)

"easternness" as a variable for the discussion of Israeli identity is based on Said's (1978) notion of 'orientalism:'

> Maximal Israeliness corresponds to the mythological attributes of the New Jew, as imagined by Zionist literature and as nostalgically recalled by modern Israeli discourse. Easternness, on the other hand, is the Israeli instantiation of alterity, of otherness; it is the opposite of Israeliness. (Lefkowitz 2004: 89–90)

Lefkowitz' diagram reflects his outsider perspective as foreign researcher. It is based on his fieldwork experience in Israel and qualitative interviews, although he does not provide quotations from the interviews in conjunction with the diagram. From the discussion it has become clear that the categories are best understood as prototypical – conforming to Lefkowitz' (2004: 89) intention who remarks in a footnote that "the analysis suggested by figure 3.1 is intended to be representative, rather than exhaustive." While there are families of Moroccan and diverse other origins who live in kibbutsim, the prototypical *kibbutsnik* is *Ashkenazi*.
It is debatable if the categories which are used in the diagram were the most relevant categories at the time of the study. Nonetheless, the figure is illustrative of various important aspects about social categorization in Israel and the construction of an Israeli identity. Twenty years have passed since Lefkowitz' (2004) publication and significant political and cultural changes occurred in Israel. For example, the Israeli government no longer supports the highly symbolic *ulpan* language courses for *'olim* in kibbutsim, many of which have long abandoned their collectivist organization in favor of privatization. Has the 'kibbuts' been replaced by another concept on the scale of 'israeliness' and is there really a trend towards cultural and political 'mizrahization?' In which respect have the social categories undergone semantic change? Similar social categories which were elicited with GERT will be analyzed in this study and it will be argued in 5.4.3 that the GERT method allows for judgments about the relevancy of the categories for the participants. So far, it seems sensible to say that Israeli society has become more pluralistic with its growing size (Burstein-Feldman et al. 2010).

Another aspect that has not been discussed is how the concept 'Arab' enters the picture. In Fig. 3.3, it is represented as primary category that comprises several sub-categories which can be related to religious, political, cultural and linguistic notions. Native Arabic speaking Israelis identify with different religious and political categories (Mahla 2020: 201). In contrast, native Hebrew speaking Arabs most likely identify and are categorized as 'Jews,' 'Israeli' and as 'Mizrahi' – until 2005 the entry *le'om* 'nation' was used on Israeli Identity Cards to categorize each citizen in terms of ethnic-national categories such as 'Jew' and 'Arab' (Lefkowitz 2004: 15).

As indicated above, Israel's CBS differentiates between 'Jews,' 'Arabs' and 'others' and refers to these categories as "Population Groups." In the CBS' recent publications, 'Jews' and 'others' are frequently conflated, in contrast to 'Arabs.' Interestingly, a footnote in CBS (2020c) reveals that "[u]ntil 1995, before publication of the Census results 'Arabs' also included 'others.'" Apparently, a major change in the official categorization of the population took place in 1995: since then, 'Arabs' have been treated as a category of their own, whereas they were conflated earlier with all others in opposition to the category 'Jews.' In 1995, the ratio of *'olim* from the former Soviet Union among Israel's population increased and among them, many are categorized

as 'others' and not as 'Jews' (see 3.1.1). Most likely this is the reason for the CBS' change of representation because it would contradict the Zionist narrative to conflate *'olim* with 'Arabs.'

On the basis of this observation, Hall's description of common social categorization processes can be related to the Israeli context.

> The world is first divided, symbolically, into good-bad, us-them, attractive-disgusting, civilized-uncivilized, the West-the Rest. All the other, many differences between and within these two halves are collapsed, simplified – i.e. stereotyped. By this strategy, the Rest becomes defined as everything that the West is not – its mirror image. It is represented as absolutely, essentially, different, other: the Other. This Other is then itself split into two 'camps': friendly-hostile, Arawak-Carib, innocent-depraved, noble-ignoble. (Hall 1992: 216)

Obviously, these processes of conceptual separation are totally artificial – despite their cultural significance. There are manifold relations between the concepts 'Arab' and 'Jewish' and there have always been trends which were not just aimed at peaceful coexistence but at true cultural exchange in Israel.

Early Zionists were to a large extent indifferent to the Arab population of Ottoman Palestine. Theodor Herzl tried to include them in his vision of a Zionist state. In his utopian novel *Alt-Neuland*, he describes Jewish-Arab relations as mutually beneficial (Herzl 1902). The children of *'olim* who were born or raised in Palestine during the British Mandate developed cultural models which embraced the local Arabic culture as a symbol of authentication (see Hofmann 2011 and Almog 2000).

In summary, it is safe to say that the dismantlement of ethnic-national categories is challenging. Cultural, historical and political aspects have been reviewed for the context of Israel, but the meaning of the categories and their utility for the categorizers remains ambiguous. Their meaning can at best be approximated, if they are understood as prototypical and relational (dependent on the context and the discourse participants). For example, Myhill describes that self-identifying Jews and Arabs expressed categorically different opinions about the definition of 'ethnicity' and 'religion' in sociolinguistic classes at the University of Haifa where he was teaching:

> The Jews categorically agree that language is completely irrelevant to one's identity as a Jew. Those who identify themselves as Arabs have been categorical in their assertion that to be an Arab means to speak Arabic (except, as I will discuss later, in the case of Arabic-speaking Jews). Jews express skepticism that Christians and Muslims can be the same 'people', while Arabs express skepticism that non-Hebrew-speakers are really 'Jews' in the same sense. (Myhill 2004: 180)

Today, ethnic categorization among Jews in Israel is intricate as Goldscheider highlights:

> [B]oundaries defining and delimiting ethnic origins have become fuzzy. Who is in and who is out of the group has become variable over time, depending in part on how affiliation and group identification are defined, even among major ethnic categories. (Goldscheider 2015: 22)

Over time, the educational level of the population has improved and differences have become more leveled – older people in general tend to have a lower level of formal education (Goldscheider 2015: 12). At the same time, intermarriage has become more common and 'ethnicity' seems to have lost its significance for the choice of partners (Weingrod 2016: 290–291).

From a cultural perspective, core concepts of the Zionist ideology have almost vanished from day-to-day life in Israel. As a cultural outsider, street names were the most obvious reminders me of the deceased ideologues and their ideas. For many Israelis too, *kibbuts galuyot* 'ingathering of the exiles' is likely to be associated foremost with the traffic news: traffic jams at a highway junction in South Tel Aviv which carries this name and connects to the *kibbuts galuyot* street are announced on the radio almost every day. The street with the symbolic name leads from the *Ayalon* highway through traditionally low-class mixed neighborhoods to the ancient Arabic port city of Jaffa which has been swallowed by the outskirts of Tel Aviv. The traffic jams on the *kibbuts galuyot* street can be taken up as metaphor for the bumpy integration processes in Israeli society which led to the emergence of a cultural mosaic:

> [D]ifferences between the so-called 'first' (descendants of Jews who arrived from Eastern and Central Europe before World War II and the Holocaust), 'second' (Jews who arrived predominately from Arab and Muslim counties during the first ten years of the Israeli statehood and their descendants), and 'third' (Israeli Arabs) Israel are more striking than in the socioeconomic and political fields. It seems that in the recent years, socioeconomic and political integration of relatively new immigrants from the English-, French-, Spanish-, and Russian-speaking countries into the 'first' Israel has indeed moved forward, but these groups of the Israeli population are still disengaged from its culture. All these groups are influenced by cultures of their own countries of origin. (Epstein 2016: 83)

3.1.4 Religious categorization in the Israeli context

> Although Judaism may be considered the most important historical focus of Jewish unity, in Israeli society it reinforces ethnic heterogeneity among Jewish groups of origin. Religion is associated with ethnic divisions at two levels; at the level of the individual *edah*, especially among Middle Easterners, and at the level of the more general distinction between Ashkenazim and *edot ha'Mizrach* or Sephardim. (Ben-Rafael & Sharot 1991: 84)

As the introductory citation indicates, categorization along the notion 'religion' is also an intricate matter and will only be reviewed briefly, here – with a focus on the

most prominent religious group in Israel – the *Haredim*. Among the Israeli Arabs, there are 1,617,100 Moslems, 144,200 Druze and 135,900 Arab Christians (CBS 2020d).

Tab. 3.2: Religious affiliation in Israel according to PewResearchCenter (2016)

	Category	Ratio in %
Jewish	Hiloni	40
Jewish	Masorti	23
Jewish	Dati (Religious)	10
Jewish	Haredi (Ultra-Orthodox)	8
Jewish	Total	81
Non-Jewish	Muslim	14
Non-Jewish	Druze	2
Non-Jewish	Christian	2
Non-Jewish	Other / no religion	1
Non-Jewish	Total	19

Together, the non-Jewish population amounts to 19% as can be seen in Table 3.2. However, being 'Jewish' does not necessarily mean being religious, as a20f2l2's statement reveals:

(3) a20f2l2 (3:48)
I'm Jewish by blood but not by religion אני יהודיה בדם אבל לא בדת

This is the answer she gave when she was filling out the sociodemographic questionnare during the interview and came to the entry "your religion." She was implying that she immigrated to Israel as *'ola* where she was completing her military service at the time of the interview. It can be inferred that she didn't base her decision to make *'aliya* on religious grounds. This common attitude toward religion is termed as *ḥiloni* 'secular' and is shared by 40% of the population, according to PewResearchCenter (2016).

> Israeli Jews of Middle Eastern origins, the so-called Mizrahim, report that they are much more religious and observant than those of Western origins, the Ashkenazim. A large majority of the nonreligious Jews are Ashkenazim, and the ultra-Orthodox sector is also largely Ashkenazi. Most Mizrahim define themselves as 'traditional' [...] few are nonreligious or anti-religious (Goldscheider et al. 2004: 130–131)

The *masoratiyim* 'traditionalists' amount to 23% and another 8% self-identify as *Haredi* which is the Israeli term for the group referred to as "ultra-orthodox" in

English and in German literature. The Hebrew term *Ḥaredi* "means 'fearful' with the reference being to fear of the Almighty" (Baumel 2006: 1). It began to spread as designation for a social group in the late 18th century as a conservative response to calls for religious reforms for Judaism (Brown 2017: 12). As Brown (2017: 12–13) points out, it was not always used in opposition to the Religious Zionism but included the group of *datim le'umim* 'national religious' until the establishment of the Israeli State. Accordingly, they differentiated themselves into two completely separate groups who no longer intermarried, dress and speak differently, ceased to co-habitate and established their own educational and religious institutions. The 'National Religious' usually self-identify with the plain term *dati* 'religious' in polls. This category comprises the group which is commonly referred to as 'settlers' in English.

Brown (2017: 7) states that although the *Haredim* are perceived as "one large black bloc" (my translation), there are innumerable differences both on a collective level of different social groups as well as on an individual level. With the description as "large black bloc" he refers to the traditional garment for *Haredi* men, which consists of black shoes, black trousers, a black coat or suit a black *kipa* and hat – as well as (black) beards. The category 'Haredim' is commonly differentiated into *Ḥasidim*, *Liṭaim* 'Lithuanians' and *Sefardim* (Brown 2017: 9). In particular, the terms *Ḥasidim* and to a lesser extent *Liṭaim* contain a large number of sects which have been developing under the authority of different Rabbis. The different *Haredi* groups also differ in their outlook on language and their language use: Some speak mostly Yiddish, while the majority speaks MH – further distinctions in different dialects of Yiddish and different kinds of Hebrew can be made (Sender 2019: 7 and Sender 2022). Dynamics between different *Haredi* groups are still at work: for example, the so-called *peleg ha-yerushalmi* 'the Jerusalem Faction' have been drifting apart from the main group of *Liṭaim*. They have founded their own synagoges, schools and educational institutions in recent years and are supposed to marry only among members of this subgroup (Sender 2019: 8). In general, *Liṭaim* use *Loshn Koydesh* – their term for the Hebrew of the Holy Scriptures – Yiddish (older generations actively and the younger passively) and MH. In contrast, the *peleg ha-yerushalmi* tends to return to Yiddish and therefore restricts the use of Hebrew as a tool to separate the groups even further (Sender 2019: 8).

All the different subgroups make it hard to render a common definition of 'Haredi.' According to Brown (2017: 11), one can recognize a *Haredi* Jew today based on his dress: a white buttoned shirt under a black suit and a black kipa. Additionally a *Haredi* sees himself obliged to the traditional Jewish laws (the *Halakha*) and the Rabbis. Their exact number is hard to determine: "[t]wo statistical estimates in 2006, for example, yielded two different figures of 444,000 and 700,000" (Assouline 2017: 15–16).

Although they constitute a minor percentage of the population, their visibility in society is considerable. This is partly due to the images which are transmitted on TV and in newspapers: newsworthy events for the secular public in Israel about the *Haredim* are most often huge gatherings of *Haredi* men in the streets of Jerusalem and in other major cities for religious ceremonies like burials, holidays, speeches of renowned Rabbis or mass protests against government policy – especially the drafting of members of their community (cf. Friedman 2002).

Their position in Israeli society is ambiguous: On the one hand, they are identified as the living symbol of the renaissance of the Jewish religion and culture which is probably unique in Jewish history; on the other hand, they have been the most severe critics of Zionism, the modern State of Israel and modern, secular conceptions of society (Brown 2017: 13, Friedman 2016: 233).

Brown (2017: 14) argues that the concept of a "society-of-scholars," a term coined by Menachem Friedman, came to be the strongest characteristic of the *Haredi* society in Israel. From the 1960s, these structures developed until they came to full bloom in the 1980s and "up to today the average *Haredi* man learns Torah almost to the age of forty – and sometimes even longer. He earns a small scholarship from the *koylel* and the family's income depends mostly on his wife" (Brown 2017: 15, my translation). The Israeli state subsidizes this lifestyle with the financing of religious and educational institutes as well as the payment of fees for the national insurance system (*biṭuaḥ le'umi*) (Brown 2017: 15).

Friedman argues for a circular causality of the society-of-scholars and the exemption of *Haredim* from military service:

> [Y]eshiva boys and avrechim at the kollelim did not serve in the army as long as Torah was their craft; that is, as long as they did not engage in another form of work while studying at a yeshiva or kollel. (Friedman 2016: 241)

Exclusively studying *Torah*, the Holy Scripture, was by itself a way to avoid being drafted. Because serving in the army was not an option for many religious boys, a massive increase of longtime students required the expansion of the religious institutions such as *yeshivot* and *kollelim* which led to the establishment of the society-of-scholars.[4] The establishment of a parallel education system for *Haredim* caused fundamental differences between the social groups:

> As the Haredi society-of-scholars grew, the gap in higher education between Haredi and non-Haredi society widened concomitantly. The fundamental Haredi worldview categorically rules out general and professional education. (Friedman 2016: 241)

4 "There are separate yeshivas for adolescents students (13–18 yrs), unmarried adult male students (yeshiva gedola), and married male students (kolels)." (Schwarz 2014: 135)

Haredi boys are the only group in Israel which is completely autonomous from the public education system. Beginning at age 13 they only study *Torah* in *yeshivot* without the subjects Mathematics, English, Science and without formal education in writing (Tsemach & Zohar 2021). In Lithuanian *yeshivot*, *Haredi* men study religious texts, mainly the Babylonian Talmud, which consists of *Mishna* and *Gemara*:

> The Mishna is a very concise text edited at the 3rd century (CE) in the Land of Israel to turn the oral law into a written source, at the time the religious leadership understood the perils of the Exile for Jewish culture. The Gemara was written by the religious leadership in the Babylonian Exile to explain the Mishna. It shows strong features of orality: It mainly includes protocols of discussions around the Mishna among Sages between the 3rd and the 5th century. The discussions include questions, clarifications, agreements, concessions, challenges, refutations and even humorous almost out of topic interjections that characterize informal conversations. (Schwarz 2014: 132)

Among *Haredim*, intermarriage in-between sects is common and the clear affiliation to a certain sect can even be optional, as a68m3l1 who identified as *Haredi* pointed out during the interview. I also noted the internationality of the *Haredi* families I came in contact with during fieldwork. More than half of them were mixed Israeli-foreign marriages. Baumel made a similar observation:

> In each of the families I observed, one parent had been born in Israel or brought there as an infant, while the other parent had moved to Israel as a teenager or even later. [...] The non-Israeli background of one member of each family is an expression of the suprageographical nature of Haredi life, common to Hassidim, Mitnagdim [the Lithuanians], and as we will see in a later chapter, the Sefardi Haredi elite. (Baumel 2006: 90)

The characteristics of the 'Haredim,' the religious category in Israel which appeared most prominently in the interviews for this study, have been reviewed. While they do not constitute a homogeneous group, they are perceived as cultural and political counterweight to mainstream, secular Israeli Jews:

> There is increasing anti-religious feeling among the majority of the secular Israeli Jewish public. Religious and secular Jews are separated residentially and institutionally, and extreme geographical concentration characterizes the ultra Orthodox. (Goldscheider et al. 2004: 129)

Almog (2000: 32–33) even claims that the *Haredi* culture was the basis for the "secular religion Zionism" which became the cornerstone of the Israeli culture in the twentieth century. Friedman hints at the shared socio-economic reality of many *Haredim*:

> [T]he flourishing of the society-of-scholars has exerted a heavy toll, on both Israeli society and on the Haredim. The high fertility rate (an average of 7.7 children per family), the lack of general and professional education, and the very late entry into the job-market created an impoverished society. (Friedman 2016: 242)

From a linguistic point of view, *Haredim* can be quite distinct from other HSs through the influence of the separate educational system and the use of Yiddish which is cultivated as L1 in a few sects – although the majority is likely to use MH in most day-to-day contexts (Ben-Rafael 2002: 73 and Sender 2024).

3.1.5 Human geography

Israel is densely populated, especially in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and the Center Districts – Fig. 3.4 shows a map of Israel's administrative districts. In contrast, the Northern and the territorial large Southern District are less densely populated (CBS 2020g). Over 90% of Israel's population lives in in urban agglomerations (Goldscheider 2015: 84). Israel's two major cities, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, are commonly characterized as cultural poles (see Alfasi & Fenster 2005). Conservative Jerusalem is built around the Old City with its religious sites in the Judean hills and houses Israel's main political institutions. Some 60 kilometers downhill at the shores of the Mediterranean lies progressive and modern Tel Aviv which was only founded in 1909, with its Bauhaus architecture and its sleek skyscrapers. Both cities have an international and mixed population, while the Arab inhabitants of both cities have been living in the traditionally Arab parts of the cities, East Jerusalem and Jaffa, respectively.

Residential segregation has been a stable feature in Israel, as Myhill describes:

> In Israel, Jews, Muslims, Christians and Druze live almost completely segregated from each other – that is one village will be Jewish, a neighboring village Muslim, the next Druze, etc.(Myhill 2004: 189)

In this respect, the map which was published by CBS (2020h) is very illustrative because it shows clearly separated regional clusters of "Jews and others," "Muslims," "Druze" and "Arab Christians" by representing them with different colors: there are mostly clusters of the same color and even in urban environments, different neighborhoods tend to share the same color. CBS (2020f) presents an overview of the absolute numbers of the Arab population and their ratio in all regions of Israel: the majority of the Arab population lives in villages in the Northern District and in the region *mizraḥ ha-sharon* in the Center District, in East Jerusalem and in the Southern District. In most regions of the Northern District, the majority of the population is Arab – in some regions even over 90%. In the two central regions of the Southern District in the Negev desert (*be'er sheva* and *har ha-negev ha-tsfoni*), the ratio between Arabs and non-Arabs is approximately even.

Israel's demography is not only separated along religious and linguistic lines, but there have also been "Israeli created" divisions "between Jews of Western and Middle Eastern origin" which resulted in the "overlap of social class and regional

residential clusters" (Goldscheider et al. 2004: 130). While Goldscheider et al. (2004: 130) already predicted that "these ethnic divisions" might last at least to the third generation of immigrants, he reaffirmed that "residential segregation" has been persistent in certain places:

> Local institutions serve as further bases for ethnic continuity. These include ethnic family networks, economic networks that are ethnically based, and some local institutions – synagogues, community centers, political interests, health clinics, and leisure-time and cultural activities (sports and music, for example) – that are concentrated among particular [249] ethnic groups. (Goldscheider 2015: 248–249)

Typically, these social cleavages among the Jewish population are associated with the cultural-geographic notions 'center' and 'periphery.' While the culturally and socio-economically powerful elite tend to populate the 'center,' 'periphery' refers to rural areas and so-called *'ayarot pituaḥ* 'development towns,' whose inhabitants have less access to the cultural and economic market. In the last decades of the twentieth century, 18.5% of the Jewish population lived in development towns, in conditions which Goldscheider describes as follows:

> The steady growth in the number of Jews living in development towns reflects a considerably higher fertility rate, balanced by continuous net out-migration from many of these towns. A significantly higher proportion of those in development towns than in other areas of the country define themselves as religious. The population in development towns has been and continues to be disadvantaged socioeconomically. The third generation growing up in them are largely the children and grandchildren of Asian and African immigrants, less educated, in lower-ranked occupations, and with lower incomes and fewer resources than the Jewish population as a whole or than their ethnic cousins in more-central urban places. [...] Selective out-migration of the more ambitious and successful young adults searching for better educational and occupational opportunities in the larger metropolitan areas left the residual ethnic population in development towns in an even more disadvantaged socioeconomic position, with even higher levels of ethnic occupational concentration. (Goldscheider 2015: 104)

Whereas most of the cultural, economic and political power is concentrated in urban areas in contemporary Israel, rural kibbutsim have been exceptional in this respect. The few hundred kibbutsim which are spread all over Israel's geographic space are relatively small and tight-knit communities with a collective organization – traditional kibbutsim do not allow for private property. The 'kibbuts' is a highly symbolic place for the Israeli national ethos which has only lost some of its significance over the last decades:

> These communal settlements have been of major interest in the study of the evolution of Israeli society, and the image of the kibbutz community – small, simple, and egalitarian – has been among the most engaging conjured up by Israeli society. (Goldscheider 2015: 96)

In 2012, 3% of the Jewish population still lived in a kibbuts, while the number of Israelis who were born to *kibbutsnik* parents or lived in a kibbuts, for some amount of time, remains considerably higher (Goldscheider 2015: 99).

Israel is a small and densely populated country. In general, the infrastructure is developed and even remote locations can be reached by public transportation. It takes about three hours by train to go more than 200 kilometers from Nahariya, the coastal town at the Lebanese border in the North, to Beer Sheva, the "capital of the Negev." Especially the Jewish population can be characterized as very mobile because of the obligatory military service: every day thousands of soldiers commute to innumerable remote military bases which are spread across the country. Marriage patterns, studies and work are further reasons why many Israelis move out of their hometowns (Goldscheider 2015: 70, 92).

Altogether it can be inferred that, at least among the Jewish population, there is a weak sense of regional belonging to a specific town. However, there are socially meaningful geographic differences which are also reflected in electoral preferences, for example: proportionally more residents of development towns, like Dimona and Bet She'an vote for the conservative *likud* party. In kibbutsim, the Labor party receives more votes than elsewhere and at some polling stations, virtually all votes go to the ultra-orthodox parties "United Torah Judaism" and *Shas* which hints at strong *Haredi* communities in cities like Bet Shemesh, Modi'in 'Ilit and Bnei Brak (Weinglass 2019).

3.2 Modern Hebrew

Commonly, the glottonym *'ivrit* which translates as plain 'Hebrew' is used by its speakers and by non-Hebrew speakers to refer to the language which is spoken and written in Israel today. In its usage in Hebrew, the term *'ivrit* is not restricted to the language of today, but can also refer to earlier and potentially all varieties of Hebrew. For further distinctions, modifiers are used together with *'ivrit*, as in *'ivrit tanakhit* for 'Biblical Hebrew' or *'ivrit meduberet* 'colloquial Hebrew.'

In this study, I will use the term 'Modern Hebrew' (MH) to refer to the bulk of Hebrew language varieties which are spoken today. The modifier 'modern' hints at a conceptual distinction between 'Ancient' or 'Biblical' Hebrew which ceased to be used as a spoken language around 200 C.E. and the language that was used by the young Ben-Gurion and his contemporaries – the Hebrew of the modern era

(Colasuonno 2013).[5] It has been argued that MH resembles a Slavic language and that it has borrowed "a huge German vocabulary." However, Bolozky (2016: 225) asserts "that it is still Hebrew and still essentially Semitic." MH is based on Ancient Hebrew, but it is not its organic continuation.

In contrast, the Hebrew which is spoken in Israel and elsewhere around the world today is the natural continuation of MH which was shaped by several generations of native speakers. Even though it is argued by Izre'el (2003) with the use of the term "Israeli Hebrew" that the spoken and written contemporary Hebrew differs considerably from the earlier stratum of MH, no further terminological distinction will be made in this study.

3.2.1 The institutionalization of MH as Israel's national language

The dissemination of Hebrew in the 20th century and its shaping as a modern language are inseparably linked to the ideologies of Political and Cultural Zionism (Chowers 2017, Shavit 2017 and Bolozky 2016). The politicization of this process is one of the reasons for the scholarly debates which have been accompanying it, as Colasuonno notes:

> The revitalization of ʿivrit has been one of the most widely debated questions among Israeli scholars since the second half of last century. (Colasuonno 2013)

Izre'el (2003) points out that some scholars still argue for the unique role of Eliezer Ben-Yehuda in the revival of Modern Hebrew and thereby reinforce his common image as a near mythological figure, which is debatable. The common image of Ben-Yehuda is described as follows:

> Ben-Yehuda is said to have begun the revival of Hebrew by insisting on speaking only Hebrew to his son, who, therefore, became the first native speaker of Hebrew in two millenia or so, and to have singlehandedly written a dictionary of Hebrew which effectively transformed it into a real modern language. (Myhill 2004: 78)

Besides Ben-Yehuda, there were other prominent figures who actively shaped MH and institutionalized the *vaʻad ha-lashon ha-ʻivrit* 'Hebrew Language Committee,' in 1905 in Jerusalem, which became the governmental body *ha-'aḳademiya la-lashon ha-ʻivrit* 'The Academy of the Hebrew Language,' (hereinafter, the "Hebrew Academy") in 1953 (Gadish 2013: 7–8). The national and cultural importance of MH was further

5 Bolozky (2016: 224) determines the linguistic end point of Classical Hebrew in "135 C.E., when the Jews were exiled following the Bar-Kokhba revolt."

stressed in 1918 through the establishment of the "Hebrew University of Jerusalem [...], an institution that embodied the school of cultural Zionism" (Chowers 2017: 359). In the same year, the British Mandate was proclaimed and Hebrew was established as "an official language alongside Arabic and English" (Spolsky & Shohamy 1999: 98). Preceding this decision, the Hebrew Language Committee was apparently involved in the persuasion of the British government – in Spolsky & Shohamy's (1999: 98) words (Gadish 2013: 9).

Besides these official aims to disseminate MH, Matras & Schiff (2005: 146) stress the role of MH as *lingua franca* "during the peak immigration periods" and compare it to a process of "creolization" (as suggested by Izre'el 2003) because "a young generation of speakers adopted Hebrew as their primary language having no parental model, nor an obvious peer-group model."

The first generation of native Israelis who were born between 1930 and 1960, the so-called *sabras* 'prickly pear,' are portrayed as having played a crucial role in the shaping of Modern Hebrew (Gafter & Mor 2023: 307). In his seminal sociological typology of the *sabra*, Almog gives the following definition:

> They numbered no more than a few hundred and comprised the counselors and commanders who were what sociologists call the 'generational nucleus.' They were the leading group that served as a behavioral model for the entire generation. (Almog 2000: 3)

Despite their relatively small number, it is believed that they set the pace in the process of nation building and have become the role model for 'Israeliness.'

> These *sabras* adopted behavior and linguistic traits that visibly differentiated them from the rest of the population. Their lives were marked by frequent excursions around the country, enrolment in the youth movement and military service. Furthermore, these young people spoke a Hebrew without any type of diasporic accent, in a tone that was purposely nonchalant, abrupt, direct and laconic. They played with Hebrew so as to show off the fact that it was their true original language. This direct language, known as *dugri* ('straightforward' in Arabic) emphasized its rootedness in the Middle East by borrowing liberally from Arabic, and expressed a scorn for the wordiness, formalism and subtleties that the *sabra* ascribed to diasporic Jews. (Ben-Rafael 2013: 97)

Bourdieu's description of linguistic creativity is reminiscent of the *sabras*' playing with Hebrew:

> The person who is sure of his cultural identity can play with the rules of the cultural game[...] (Bourdieu 1991: 125)

With the negligence of the explicit linguistic norms which were fixed in a scholarly environment, the generation that succeeded Ben-Yehuda expressed their social power and underlined their cultural influence which resulted in their own implicit

linguistic norms. Mor (2020: 122) characterizes these two main strands of normative activity as "institutional (planned) and native (unplanned)" and asserts their prevalence in the public discourse in Israel until today.

However, this is not the place to delve further into the historical process that shaped contemporary MH, which is summarized at length by Myhill (2004: 73–97) after this introductory statement:

> [T]he revival of Hebrew is, as far as we know, an event unique in human history. There has never before or since been a case of what I am referring to as a 'revival', a natural language which was previously spoken by native speakers, then ceased to have native speakers, and then came again to have an entire community of speakers – in fact an entire nation of native speakers. (Myhill 2004: 74)

The common stress on the uniqueness of the revival of MH says more about the ideological importance that is bestowed on MH than about the process itself. Hebrew's unique importance for the building of a 'Jewish nation' was already advocated for by Aḥad Haʿam, one of the founding-fathers of cultural Zionism.

> Given the Jews' dispersal throughout the diaspora, language is the main factor that preserved their shared identity. As he put it: 'we barely have any remnant; only our language itself still shows signs of life' (Ahad Haʿam 1947, 113). (Chowers 2017: 362)

Bokelmann's description of the integrative potential of a common language helps to understand the important role of MH in the consolidation of the Israeli state:

> The integrative or separating function explains the extraordinary importance of a common language, e.g. for the emergence of new political entities – when new states emerge or political borders shift. In these contexts, the shared standard language functions as a common marker of shared identity for a heterogeneous and not necessarily historically connected totality of citizens. This is particularly meaningful if the political space encompasses several cultural areas.[6] (Bokelmann 2020: 86, my translation)

Berger & Luckmann (1967: 173) equally stress the importance of a common language for the fostering of communities from a constructivist perspective. Accordingly, the maintenance of reality through ongoing processes of identity construction is depen-

6 German original: Die integrative bzw. separierende Funktion erklärt, warum eine gemeinsame Sprache zum Beispiel im Zuge der Entstehung neuer politischer Entitäten von derart großer Bedeutung ist; beispielsweise bei der Entstehung neuer Staaten oder der Verschiebung politischer Grenzen. Hier bietet die geteilte Standardsprache der heterogenen und historisch nicht unbedingt verbundenen Gesamtheit der Bürger einen gemeinsamen Marker geteilter Identität. Dies ist in denjenigen Fällen, in denen der politische Raum mehrere Kulturräume umfasst, von besonderer Bedeutung.

dent on the maintenance of a common language. Therefore, this common language is defined by conceptual distinctions between 'my/our language' and 'your/her/his/their language' – on the most basic level. These distinctions are expressed in the speakers' DK as linguistic norms (see 2.1.4.3). With the expansion of the size of the "imagined communities" – in Anderson's (1983) words – these linguistic notions of belonging get abstracted into notions of 'dialects' and 'national languages' which serve to demarcate the communities' identity, in contrast to others. Taking up the example from above, the *sabras'* conventionalization of their own linguistic norms in MH served them to define their own sub-group within the recently established community of HSs. According to Bokelmann (2020: 86–87), speakers commonly associate their standard language with their cultural tradition and conceptualize the language itself as a cultural achievement. HSs often express this attitude by referring to Hebrew as the language of the *meḳorot* 'the (written) religious sources' and by characterizing the dissemination of MH as a 'miracle,' as will be discussed in 6.2.3. Bolozky hints at the symbolic value of MH for the Israeli society which has been persistent until today:

> [O]wing to the central role Hebrew played in building national identity, any deviation from the normative standards of formal literary Hebrew affects the nation, its culture, and its prestige. (Bolozky 2016: 224)

The cultural emphasis on the normative standards of MH is institutionalized in the educational system in Israel which teaches the subject of *lashon* 'language' in addition to *sifrut* 'literature' for Hebrew as L1, until the end of highschool.

One further example shall serve to illustrate the relatively prominent position – judging from my German perspective – of this topic in the discourse in Israel. When I picked up a student newspaper in the Hebrew University during the first fieldwork stage, I was surprised to find a two page article at a prominent place in the journal which reported on the controversy surrounding whether it should be allowed to conduct study programs in English. Questioning the status of MH as the main language of education in the Hebrew University – one of the outstanding national symbols of modern Israel – still seems to be taken up as a sacrilege by some, as the sub-title of the article illustrates:

The Academy of the Hebrew Language cried out loud and also inside the university itself resistance has arisen ('The founding fathers are watching in shame and turn over in their graves') In contrast, the administration of the Hebrew University explains that this is the only way to play on an international court. A seemingly small decision to transfer certain study programs to English wakes up a discussion that has been in a coma for many years. (Motskin & Avital 2019: 6)

האקדמיה ללשון העברית זעקה וגם בתוך האוניברסיטה עצמה התעוררה התנגדות ('האבות המייסדים חוזים בבושה ומתהפכים בקברם'). מנגד, הנהלת האוניברסיטה העברית מסבירה שזו הדרך היחידה לשחק במגרש הבין-לאומי. החלטה קטנה לכאורה, להעביר תוכניות לימוד מסוימות לשפה האנגלית, העירה ויכוח שהיה בתרדמת במשך שנים רבות.

3.2.2 Studies on Linguistic Variation in Israel

> A century of Hebrew speech has passed, and the scholarly world has lost a unique opportunity to record the emergence of a language as a full-fledged communicative system. Hebrew is still undergoing rapid change because of massive waves of immigration and swift changes in Israeli society. (Izre'el et al. 2001: 172)

In the preparatory phase for this study, I consulted with Israeli linguists who confirmed my impression that the field of Sociolinguistics on MH in Israel is far from well-researched. Among others, I met the authors of the introductory citation, Shlomo Izre'el and Benjamin Hary who had devised a project for a large corpus of spoken Hebrew (SH) which was only partially completed.[7] Burstein-Feldman et al. (2010: 232–233) equally assert that "Israeli sociolinguistics cries for more intensive study of the country's major social cleavages, between Arabs and Jews, Ashkenazim and Sefardim, young and old, and between elites and the disenfranchised." Also Colasuonno (2013) describes Sociolinguistics of Ancient and Modern Hebrew as a "field of pioneering research." While there is a considerable amount of research on Hebrew, in general, one can get the impression that the usage-based study of MH has been somehow overlooked:

> The field of Israeli Hebrew linguistics has been developing in the shadow of a strong prescriptivist tradition in institutions such as the Hebrew Language Academy, the mainstream public media, the school system and the enormous establishment entrusted with teaching Hebrew as a foreign language. This attitude is also self-imposed by academic circles and Hebrew language departments. For many years, the academic study of Hebrew was seen in Israel as synonymous

7 See the homepage of the project: http://cosih.com/english/

> with educational measures aimed at safeguarding 'correct' pronunciation, grammar and style. (Matras & Schiff 2005: 147)

As has been argued above, Israel is a "standard language culture" – following Milroy's (2012: 577) definition – in that "there is a general consciousness of a standard" and that "there has been considerable influence of the standard ideology on their [the linguists] underlying assumptions." In this respect, Kalev (2004: 6) argues that there is "a diglossic split between formal literary Hebrew and colloquial Hebrew," which has been ignored by many researchers who instead focused "almost exclusively on an artificial literary register that doesn't necessarily reflect native speakers' intuitions."

As outlined in 1.1, the scholarly consensus has been implying that there are neither clearly distinguishable dialects, nor other varieties in MH. Over the last years, this consensus has been questioned and more empirical studies on sociolinguistic variation in MH have been published. Schiff (2005: 42–67) gives a detailed account of the research that has been carried out on variation in SH up to the year of the work's publication and Henkin (2020), Berrebi (2021) and Walters et al. (2023) contain more recent literature reviews. The first studies on SH, from the 1960s, focused on phonetic variation, comparing speakers from Middle Eastern and North African origin with speakers from European origin. The terminology that was used to describe two varieties of SH – 'General Israeli Hebrew' and 'Oriental Israeli Hebrew' – reflects the political discourse at the time when Jewish Israeli society was conceptualized as being divided along the ethnic categories of *Ashkenazim* and the marked category *'edot ha-mizraḥ* (Schwarzwald 2013). A second trend in the usage-based studies is the investigation of HSs' deviation from the normative standard along selected variables such as inflectional morphology or gender and number agreement, with the aim to describe language change (e.g. Schwarzwald 1981 and Ravid 1995).

In recent accounts, scholars point out that there are group specific differences in MH (cf. Henkin 2020). Schwarzwald (2007: 80) asserts that the huge difference between religious and secular HSs creates different types of Hebrew. Furthermore, she claims that the difference between *Mizrahim* and others is still felt, in spite of inter-ethnic marriages and trends of the melting pot which were at work in Israel. Accordingly, it manifests itself foremost in phonological phenomena, while morphology and syntax have not been researched Schwarzwald (2007: 80). Schiff's (2005) corpus-based description of variation in SH did not yield systematic variation between speakers from different origins, although this topic was not central to the study. There are a few milieu studies, such as Levon's (2010) *Language and the Politics of Sexuality: Lesbians and Gays in Israel* which was reviewed above (see 2.1.2.4) and Bentolila's (1983) sociophonological description of *Hebrew as spoken in a rural settlement of Moroccan Jews in the Negev*.

To the best of my knowledge, there is no monograph about sociolinguistic variation in MH from a general perspective. The terminology for variation in MH is sketchy and most of the research is not usage-based. Matras & Schiff (2005: 151) argue for a stylistic continuum along the levels of "Formal (Normative) Israeli Hebrew, Educated Israeli Hebrew, General Colloquial Israeli Hebrew and Working Class Vernacular Israeli Hebrew." Although they list characteristic variants for each level, they arrive at this classification without perceptual data. There are studies indicating that socially upward-moving Israelis tend to depharyngealize their style of speech, but the opposite can also be witnessed, for example, among the most sophisticated scholars of Hebrew (Gafter 2019: 231).

Gafter's (2014) comparative study of HSs from a tendentially homogeneous community of Yemenite origin in Rosh ha-Ayn and HSs from Yemenite, Moroccan and different origins from a more heterogeneous environment in Tel Aviv showed that Rosh ha-Ayn speakers cultivated their pharyngealized realization of /ʿ/, the letter *ʿayn*, as [ʕ], whereas the other speakers realized the letter as [ʔ]. Gafter (2014: 190) investigates some other phonological variables and uses sociolinguistic interviews to determine that the "meanings associated with the pharyngeals cannot be understood as simply meaning 'Mizrahi,' nor can they be resolved along an axis of standardness." Instead he argues that

> these variables construct an identity of the most authentic speaker of Hebrew – and the most authentic speaker is authentic in more ways than just speech. This persona matches other social practices of the Rosh Ha'ayin Yemenites, who [...] are invested in a distinct identity that is linked to days long gone. (Gafter 2014: 181)

With their experimental study on the perception of Hebrew Pharyngeals, Berrebi et al. (2022) demonstrate that Hebrew speakers are well equipped to acoustically distinguish voiceless pharyngeals and uvular fricatives. At the same time, they report that most speakers refrain from actively producing socially marked pharyngeals which hints at ongoing sound change. Berrebi & Peperkamp's 2024 experimental study provides evidence that rhythm of speech is an important factor for participants to distinguish HSs along the categories 'Ashkenazi' and 'Mizrahi.'

In a more general context, Henshke (2015: 163–164) argues "that a sociolect has emerged in Israel, one that is characteristic of the speech of residents of the geographic and social periphery and which clearly shows the influence [164] of the Judeo-Arabic linguistic substrate of those speakers." Henshke's claim to describe a whole sociolect can be contested on the basis that she lists mostly lexical variants, but does not compare variants with a control group, or perceptual data.

Henshke's (2017) title *Israeli, Jewish, Mizraḥi or Traditional? On the nature of the Hebrew of Israel's periphery* suggests that there are several factors which compli-

cate a theoretical concept of a somehow uniform sociolect of "Israel's periphery." While the influence of an Arabic substrate on the linguistic phenomena which Henshke describes is considerable, her claim for a sociolect needs to be substantiated with further data which reveal insights into HSs' perceptions and their representations of these phenomena. Henshke (2017: 137) suggests "to refer to this sociolect as Traditional-Mizrahi Hebrew, which occupies an intermediate place between 'Jewish Hebrew' and 'Israeli Hebrew'" and thereby introduces a religiously determined perspective of research on MH, in contrast to 'Israeli Hebrew' which is associated with secularism.[8]

In general, there is not much linguistic research on religious HSs. Although *Haredim* are the most prominent religious group in Israel and the field is well studied by other disciplines, it has barely been researched from a linguistic perspective: most linguistic studies about the *Haredi* society in Israel such as Assouline (2017) focused on Yiddish and on code-switching to Hebrew by Yiddish speakers (Sender 2019: 6–7). There are some lexical collections of *Haredi* Hebrew terms such as Rosenthal (2007b) which are rather anecdotal than extensive.

The ethnographic work by Baumel (2006) is a comparative description of four *Haredi* sects. Besides the preliminary investigation of the language practice in four different families who associate with *Ḥabad*, *Liṭaim* (in the study referred to as *mitnagdim*), *Gur (Gerrer)* and *Sefardim*, the study gives an overview about linguistic, historical and cultural aspects, and more detailed accounts on the educational institutions and the sects' newspapers. Baumel provides a brief summary on language variation among *Haredim*

> Tradition and history begin to play an important role, and in Israel, all of the sects that I have targeted use Ivrit [MH] as their basic language, but they vary in their attitude to that language, and even in the forms of Ivrit which they use. As for other languages – sacred, quasisacred, Jewish vernacular, and foreign – each sect adheres to a different policy influenced by its historical background [43] and contemporary praxis as presented here in brief. Even in issues of gendered language – the languages, or even the type of Ivrit used among Haredi women, or by Haredi men when speaking to Haredi women – there is variation among the groups. (Baumel 2006: 42–43)

Sender (2019, 2022) analyses a corpus of SH from within the *peleg ha-yerushalmi* – a Lithouanian-*Haredi* sect who resist the draft. She investigates mostly phonetic traits, to which she refers as *hagaya 'ashkenazit ba-'ivrit ha-ḥaredit 'Ashkenazi* pronunciation in *Haredi* Hebrew,' and pragmatic aspects. As common variants in the corpus she lists loans from *Yiddish*, and non-normative gender agreement between nouns, adjec-

8 I also consulted with Yehudit Henshke and Roey Gafter and am thankful to them for sharing their inspiring and insightful thoughts on the topic.

tives and numerals which are not investigated because they are widely attested in SH (Sender 2019: 9–10). Sender's dissertational work, *Hebrew Spoken by Haredi Litaim (Litvish-Yeshivish) in Israel – a Socio-linguistic Description* (Sender In preparation), takes on a general perspective on a under-researched topic, while Sender (Forthcoming) assesses the function of interspersed Yiddish in Hebrew spoken by *Haredim*. Some socio-historical causes for distinct lexical, phonetic and morhpo-syntactic phenomena that are attested in the Hebrew speech of *Haredim* are suggested by Sender (2024).

Immigrants from the former Soviet Union and their descendants are a major social group in Israel who have been receiving some scholarly attention. In her dissertation *Language attitudes and social identity: a study on Russian-speaking immigrant communities in Israel and Germany* Lucchetti (2023: 222) sketches the research field of "Russian in the diaspora" and discusses contact phenomena that are notable in the Hebrew spoken by this group in Israel.

Another marginal area of sociolinguistic research in Israel is the military context. Izre'el et al. (2001: 191) attribute an "enormous impact on Israeli Hebrew" to the army.

> Special attention is due to the language of the military. Obligatory military service in Israel is three years for men and twenty-one months for women. Men serve further time in the reserve forces, sometime until the age of 49. Many more people serve in the military or in other security forces on a professional basis. Since Israel is a land of immigration par excellence, military service has always served as a melting pot for Israeli society. Moreover, due to its extreme significance for Israeli society, the military is known to have had an enormous impact on Israeli Hebrew. This is mostly observable in the lexicon and phraseology, but definitely goes far beyond these areas. (Izre'el et al. 2001: 191)

According to Rosenthal (2020: 13), the Israeli "armylect" which he terms *tsahalit* is a central component in the everyday language of many Israelis – also in contexts outside the army.[9] Citations in *tsahalit* and references to *tsahalit* can be found in books, movies, TV series and homepages (Rosenthal 2020: 13). Besides his monograph on *Speaking tsahalit* (Rosenthal 2020), Rosenthal (2014) investigates *The reflection of the military hierarchy in the language of the Israeli army*. To describe the different contexts of usage for *tsahalit*, I have suggested a functional continuum which ranges from professional language restricted to specific military units to everyday contexts and slang (Striedl 2019).

Linguistic and other research literature have often propagated an over-simplistic rendition of the linguistic reality in Hebrew in Israel, due to the lack of thorough research in many sociolinguistic domains. The Israeli linguists whom I consulted

9 The term is derived from the Hebrew acronym for the Israeli Defense Forces, *tsahal*.

for this study lamented the current state of neglect of their research area and were very welcoming. Researchers with an outsider perspective can help to complement studies which were conducted from within the linguistic system – this should be encouraging for anyone who is envisaging a research project in this domain. As has been argued in general, in 2.1.4, research with a focus on the speakers' perception and their representation of linguistic variation is needed to get a better understanding of any linguistic system. The findings of this study can be used as a basis for the further investigation in this direction.

While various areas invite usage-based research on MH, in my opinion, the most intriguing and promising fields of research for variationist studies in Israel are the military and the religious sectors of the society. It has to be noted that both areas are not easily accessible. However, this does not completely rule out the possibility for usage-based research, from my experience.

Fig. 3.4: Israel districts by Ynhockey (retrieved from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Israel_districts.png on February 4, 2025), Public Domain